

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (25 November 2020)

Purpose of the note: To ensure members are aware of the plans that are being put in place to ensure that Breckland is prepared, as far as possible, to respond to the impact of Coronavirus.

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1. Recent Government advice/action

NEW: New film shows importance of ventilation to reduce spread of COVID-19

A [new film](#) has been created as part of the 'Hands. Face. Space' campaign which urges public to adopt simple health behaviours to help reduce the risk of the virus spreading. This comes as research shows that being in a room with fresh air can reduce the risk of infection by over 70%.

NEW: Government secures millions of doses of vaccine

The Government has completed negotiations with biotech company Moderna to secure access to 5 million [doses of its promising vaccine](#), enough for around 2.5 million people. If it is approved by the medicines regulator, the vaccine could be delivered to the UK as early as Spring 2021. This would follow the first deliveries of the Pfizer/BioNTech and the Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccines which, subject to final checks, could be available before the end of the year.

NEW: Janssen to begin COVID-19 vaccine trials in the UK

Global pharmaceutical company Janssen has begun [clinical trials of its potential vaccine](#) in the UK, involving 6,000 volunteers. Jointly funded by the government's Vaccine Taskforce, it is the latest study to test the safety and effectiveness of a potential COVID-19 vaccine. It is the third vaccine to enter clinical trials in the UK, alongside Novavax and University of Oxford / AstraZeneca.

NEW: Royal Mail to collect COVID-19 test kits 7 days a week

To increase convenience for test kit customers, Royal Mail is [introducing a weekend extension](#) for over 15,000 existing priority post boxes from 21 November. Royal Mail has also increased its weekday priority post boxes from 33,000 to over 35,000. Find your nearest priority post box on the [Royal Mail website](#) or via the app.

NEW: £12.2 million boost for genomic surveillance to help stop transmission of COVID-19

The public will be better protected from COVID-19 with £12.2 million of funding awarded to potentially life-saving research into [how the virus spreads and evolves](#) through genome sequencing.

NEW: Two new mega labs to open in 2021 to transform the UK's diagnostic facilities

Two new, high throughput laboratories will open in early 2021, cementing the UK as a world leader in diagnostics and creating up to 4,000 jobs. The laboratories in [Leamington Spa and Scotland](#) will add 600,000 to the UK's daily testing capacity when operating at full capacity, meaning faster

turnaround times for test results. These new labs will also provide diagnostic capacity for other critical illnesses, including cancer.

NEW: Pilot for family members to get regular testing for safer care home visits

Named family and friends may soon be able to regularly visit loved ones in care homes as [a new testing pilot](#) is launched to provide frequent testing.

The latest government and Health information and advice can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>.

2. Supporting businesses and employees

UPDATED: National support schemes:

There are a number of locally and nationally funded support schemes available to help businesses. Details and application forms can be found on our [Coronavirus Financial Information](#) web pages. Members are encouraged to encourage eligible local businesses to apply as soon as possible.

Other national initiatives include:

- *Business boost for restaurants, pubs and cafes as government extends takeaway services - Restaurants, pubs and cafes will get automatic freedoms to provide takeaway services for another year.
- *Reduced VAT for hospitality, accommodation and attractions until the end of March 2021
- *Business rates relief for hospitality, retail, leisure and nurseries until the end of March 2021
- *Animal welfare grants of up to £730,000 for zoos or aquariums affected by coronavirus (COVID-19).

UPDATED: The Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSB)

Business premises forced to close because of Covid restrictions can access grants worth up to £3,000. Breckland Council is responsible for administering this grant locally and has been awarded £2.1m. We have currently paid £1,037,416 to 723 businesses (to 23/11/20) and estimate the total number of eligible business to be 1,194 with 815 having claimed so far.

To be eligible, businesses must be registered for business rates (although can be in receipt of 100% rate relief) and must have been mandated to close because of the current restrictions. Businesses who operate click and collect, but are otherwise closed, are still eligible.

UPDATED: Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG)

Resource has been made available from central government for Breckland Council to help those businesses that are not eligible for the Local Restriction Support Grant, but are still severely impacted by the second national restrictions. This is a one-off payment to support over this period, with the grant going 'live' on 20 November.

To be eligible the business must be either be:

- *Forced to close due to the national restrictions - but not eligible under the Local Restriction Support Grant (LRSB); or
- *Allowed to remain open, but significantly impacted by the restrictions due to being a principle supplier into businesses which have been forced to close

Further criteria for businesses include that they:

*Cannot also be claiming support through either LRS or Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS)

*Must have been open and trading prior to lockdown on 4th November

*Must be Breckland-based (home-based businesses and mobile businesses are eligible but must be able to demonstrate they are based in Breckland)

Members are encouraged to direct any interested businesses to [apply online](#).

UPDATED: Support for High Streets

As part of our support package for High Streets, we are providing additional support during the national lockdown via:

***New #EnjoyDiscoverExplore programme**, with targeted social media promotion on the great businesses offering click and collect or online services during lockdown. Street Banners to support this programme are being displayed in towns from w/c 23/11/20

***Digital High Streets Programme** – a Breckland Council initiative enabling High Street businesses to gain access to free training and workshops on making the most of digital, as well as grants to help invest in new digital capabilities (e.g. a brand new website, or social media marketing)

***Business expansion and PPE grants** – cash grants helping tourism, leisure and hospitality businesses meet the cost of Covid adaptations and expanding their business to reach more customers when lockdown lifts. These grants have closed having successfully awarded £100,000 to support Breckland businesses.

Whilst in preparation for High Streets re-opening, we are already getting ready to provide further support with:

***Reopening, Christmas and 'Shop Local' campaigns** and [e-directory of local businesses](#)

***Continuing to provide confidence to shoppers and businesses** – with hand sanitiser stations and social distancing signage; and businesses able to access free training and support packs including posters and floor stickers

We are constantly reviewing opportunities for – and the needs of – businesses to shape the current solutions. Should Members have any suggestion or comments please contact the [Regeneration Team](#)

UPDATED: Support for start-ups

To help manage issues of Covid redundancy and to diversify the local economy, Breckland Council is launching a new start-up support programme for potential Breckland entrepreneurs. This includes **start-up grants scheme**, which has funding available of up to £10k and particularly aimed at those who have lost their jobs or cannot access new employment due to the pandemic.

The review panel sits on 26/11/20 to assess the first nine applications. The team have engaged with 17 businesses with support so far on this scheme. Details and applications are [available online](#). We are grateful for any support Members can provide in encouraging interested people to apply.

UPDATED: Support for wider businesses

As part of our new re-launched Business Support Offer, we are actively helping Breckland businesses via:

***Advice & Guidance** – via phone, email or from our pre-bookable consultations. We also offer an extensive signposting and advice service via our revised website.

***Covid-Safe and Prevent Programmes** – jointly supported through Regeneration, Environmental Health, Public Protection, and other agencies. To date we have delivered advice and intervention to over 100 businesses.

***Business Rate Relief** – which is applied by ARP, for more details see, and has provided almost £15m of relief since the pandemic started

***Business Support Grants** – with specific support grants currently available to hospitality / leisure businesses, start-ups, and high street businesses.

***Innovation Grant Mentoring Scheme** - A new programme is launching in Norfolk & Suffolk to help owners of small to medium sized businesses to apply for innovation grants to support their business. Norfolk & Suffolk County Councils have joined forces and devised a programme to help local businesses access a significantly higher percentage of available funding.

Details and applications can be found [online](#). We are grateful for any support Members can provide in getting interested people to apply.

UPDATED: Economic support for individuals

To support the Council's vulnerability agenda, and help mitigate the economic impacts of Covid for individuals, we have established a significant Covid-talent programme which includes:

***1:1 advice and guidance** – to help individuals navigate the jobs market, find opportunity, and cope with the shock of redundancy. Since October this has supported 92 individuals.

***Group Skills & Support Sessions** – to help adults and young people with tools they need to competitively access jobs market

***Start-up support and advice** – helping people find new opportunity through their own enterprise, with financial support and guidance available

Members are asked to support the initiative by encouraging residents to access [details and appointment bookings](#).

UPDATED: Growing back stronger

We are making sure our key growth programmes are able to continue in spite of the challenges of Covid, and a further lockdown, in order that Breckland is well placed to grow. These include:

***Thetford Power Project** – We are in the final stages of design and will be reviewing commercial terms soon, prior to works starting in Spring 2021. The new primary substation will be energised in Summer 2022 unlocking more housing and employment land for development on the Kingsfleet SUE.

***Snetterton Growth Programme** – Following the imminent planning application for the new electricity substation, this £4m investment will start on site within the next few months. In parallel a programme of activity is underway to realise the advantages this brings, such as generating investment and creating new jobs locally

3. Community support

NEW: Norfolk Winter Resilience Fund

Covid-19 continues to present challenges for our local charities and voluntary groups as they struggle to meet the needs of the vulnerable people they help. As the impacts of the pandemic continue to unfold, many more people may face particular hardship over the winter months due to health, low income or isolation.

The **Norfolk Winter Resilience Fund** can support, for example, activities that help to reduce isolation for older and vulnerable people, provide food supplies, a hot meal or warm clothing, or help vulnerable people to access local services and information that may prevent a crisis situation arising.

Grants of up to **£5,000** are available for projects that help those in the community facing very real challenges as the weather gets colder; including the frail elderly, disabled, people with chronic

medical conditions and the homeless. This funding can also assist community action where a local outbreak of Covid-19 is identified and restrictions imposed, where urgent help is needed to support those at risk and/ or self-isolating.

The fund is available to organisations that are a Charity, Church/PCC, Parish/Town Council, Social Enterprise/CIC, or Voluntary/Community Group. Find out more and [apply online](#).

NEW: Warm Homes Fund

Breckland and all other Norfolk councils are part of the warm homes partnership. Along with other local schemes, this offers a number of grant-funded solutions to those in need of support to improve their home's energy efficiency and affordability. Further to the initial funding, the partnership has recently been successful in applying for £1.24m government funding to support individuals and families on low incomes.

The funding will support vulnerable households by installing over 200 energy-efficient measures, including air source heat pumps, and loft, cavity and external wall insulation. Currently, residents on low incomes can apply for help insulating park homes and replacing old heating systems with more efficient air source heat pumps. In the future, we hope to provide financial support to help people with the first-time installation of central heating systems. Energy advice is also on hand from Homes Support Officers.

More information can be found [online](#).

UPDATED: Accessing support

Individuals requiring support this winter should contact the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) number for Norfolk, so the call can be triaged correctly and all options to support can be offered at the earliest opportunity. **As a reminder, the SPOC is run by Norfolk County Council and can be accessed on 0344 800 8020 (support is available Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm).**

Breckland Council's Community Hub is able to help people access food via an online priority delivery slot or by asking NAS (Norfolk Assistance Scheme) to send a food parcel (if they have not already contacted the SPOC).

Pharmacies should arrange deliveries directly with residents. However, if this is not happening for any reason and there is an urgent need we may be able to arrange for a volunteer to collect on the resident's behalf.

UPDATED: Self-Isolation Support

Our Self-Isolation Support Payments scheme, which is administered on behalf of the Government, provides £500 payments to support low paid workers who are told by NHS Test & Trace to self-isolate but can't work from home. More details can be found on the Breckland Council [website](#).

NEW: Clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) supermarket deliveries FAQ

In this edition of the briefing, we have included a short FAQ to outline how our most clinically vulnerable residents can access deliveries from supermarkets.

Q. What does 'priority' supermarket deliveries mean in practice?

A. Although supermarkets operate slightly differently from each other, 'priority' broadly means that matched CEVs will be able to see more slots than non-priority access customers can, and therefore are more likely to be able to access a slot sooner.

Q. If someone is not yet registered with a supermarket, do they need to register with their preferred supermarket as well as registering via the National Shielding Service System?

A. Yes. In order for matching to take place the user should register for an account with their chosen supermarket(s) as well as on the National Shielding Service System. Supermarket slots continue for individuals who have already registered for priority slots previously.

If people did not register on the previous system, they can [register on the National Shielding Service System](#) which is now in operation.

Q. Are councils the conduit for supermarket slots or is the data managed centrally?

A. Central government will manage the data centrally and will send details of individuals who want a supermarket slot to the participating supermarkets.

Q. Once someone has registered on the National Shielding Support Service site and asked for priority supermarket deliveries, how quickly will they get access to them?

A. Customers may prefer to set up an account with more than one supermarket to maximise their chances of being matched and being able to book suitable delivery slots.

Data is fed daily to supermarkets, and it is up to each supermarket as to how frequently they match this data, with the upper end of this range being weekly. Hence, once an individual has both registered with the National Shielding Service site and registered for an account with a supermarket, matching should happen within one week. However, this timeline may vary at busy times, especially in the run-up to Christmas.

Q. What if CEV's can't register with supermarkets as the email address doesn't match?

A. CEVs should use the email address on the National Shielding Service System that they have registered with the supermarket or will use to register with the supermarket.

4. Breckland service updates

NEW: Covid Support Officer recruitment

Plans are underway for the end of the current period of restrictions next week. This includes recruiting a pool of Covid Support Officers who will work in the community, engaging with business and residents as well as assisting with local contact tracing work. The officers are being funded from a share of national funding.

NEW: Enforcement

To help ensure people are kept safe and businesses are complying with latest legislation, we continue to work closely with businesses in partnership with our police and trading standards colleagues. We are providing support and advice where businesses are unclear on how to comply with the law; in a small number of cases, where premises are flouting covid restrictions, we are prepared to take enforcement action alongside our partners.

UPDATED: Cranswick County Foods

- *The majority of factory staff have completed self-isolation and returned to work
- *Further results have been received from the remaining staff tests – with a low rate of positives – so a small number are self-isolating
- *Final test results due this week
- *Outbreak will be closed 28 days from the last positive test received
- *Factory continues to operate but with reduced capacity in some areas still (mostly retail)

*Further Environmental health and HSE visit planned for later this week to review control measures in place now that majority of staff have returned to site

*Next meeting is planned for Friday pm

Frontline services

The vast majority of the services that we provide will continue where the service is essential, subject to risk assessments and latest guidance issued to staff.

Critical services, such as Housing, Waste, Customer Services and Public Protection, all continue to operate, albeit in some cases, this is being managed in a more flexible way. You can see the latest [service updates on our website](#).

Leader, Breckland Council
25.11.2020